

The Immigrants' Advocate

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*Mary Joanna Treglia in her office at the Community House.
Courtesy of Mary J. Treglia Community House.*

The Immigrants' Advocate

Mary Treglia and the Sioux City Community House, 1921-1959

SUZANNE O'DEA SCHENKEN

EQUIPPED WITH A LIVELY SENSE OF HUMOR, a crooked smile, and a genuine affection for people, Mary Joanna Treglia served Sioux City's immigrants and their children for almost four decades through her work at the Community House. From 1921 to 1959 Treglia's leadership at the Community House helped change the lives of individuals in many ways. She served her neighbors through case work and naturalization programs; and she improved the quality of life in Sioux City by negotiating for fair educational policies and for flood control.¹

Treglia's contributions to Sioux City's East Side immigrant neighborhood took many forms. Through her work as Community House director, she helped neighborhood residents become acquainted with each other, often pulling housebound women out of their homes and into the social activities at the settlement. Through various clubs, educational programs, and

1. The story of Treglia's life is based on a variety of sources. The Community House Annual Reports (available at the Mary J. Treglia Community House), which Treglia prepared, provided information about the settlement's many activities and about the people served there. Newspaper articles recorded many aspects of Treglia's life from her youth through her activities in the Community House and her many achievements and honors during her adult years. Sioux City school board minutes and city council minutes provided documentation for the official actions of those groups. Treglia's speeches and comments to the National Federation of Settlements revealed her opinions and evaluations of many aspects of settlement work. Interviews with several people who knew Treglia provided opinions and recollections of her, and clues to understanding events surrounding her life.

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casework services that she organized and administered, the Community House met many personal and social needs in the neighborhood. She also introduced neighborhood residents to the larger community, bringing groups like the American Association of University Women and the Junior League into the Community House, allowing the members of those organizations the opportunity to meet people in the settlement house neighborhood.

Treglia also helped East Side residents solve neighborhood problems. She provided leadership and organizational skills to the residents when they objected to actions of the public school board and when city officials turned a deaf ear to their pleas for flood control. Treglia negotiated with other community leaders on behalf of East Side residents, often using the influence of powerful allies in the process of finding solutions. Her ability to work with the poor residents of Sioux City's East Side and with the city's powerful and influential leaders benefited both groups.

Several factors contributed to Treglia's success as a community leader. Her job as a settlement house worker gave her an agency from which she could organize social, educational, and political activities. In addition, the community had long been acquainted with the Sioux City native from newspaper articles that began reporting her athletic achievements when she was only twelve years old. As an adult, Treglia knew the people in Sioux City; many city leaders had been childhood playmates. In addition, Treglia's personality charmed the people around her with its optimism and goodwill.

Studying Treglia's life and work contributes to two areas of research: the leadership of settlement house workers, and Italian-American women as leaders. Numerous studies have been made of notable women such as Jane Addams of Hull House in Chicago and Lillian Wald of Henry Street Settlement in New York City. Most settlement workers were, like Addams and Wald, "overwhelmingly of middle-class and professional background, often from families of substantial means, well-educated, mostly of native-born, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant inheritance." Treglia's Catholic, Italian-American heritage and her family's economic struggles contrast sharply with the backgrounds of most other settlement workers. Examining Treglia's

life also expands the scholarship on the role of Italian-American women beyond the scope of their relationship to the family, the focus of much research on those women.²

MARY TREGLIA'S PARENTS, Rose and Anthony, left Italy to seek opportunity in America in the 1880s. Soon after settling in Sioux City, the Treglias opened a confectionary shop in the community's downtown area. On October 7, 1897, their only child, Mary, was born. Tragedy struck the family when Anthony died less than two years after Mary's birth. To support herself and her daughter, Rose continued the business.³

Mary, too, found opportunities in this country. A talented baseball player, she found employment playing for a women's baseball team, as well as working as an umpire for men's teams and displaying her talent in pregame exhibitions. She also acted in several silent movies during a brief sojourn in California.⁴ Through her acting and baseball careers, Treglia gained experience talking to the press, appearing on camera, and presenting herself before the public. These skills undoubtedly helped her in her later public activities as an adult.

When Treglia began her work at the Community House in 1921, she did not have a "baptism by fire," as New York settlement house worker Lillian Wald had experienced.⁵ Rather, baseball and ravioli dinners initiated Treglia. Her understand-

2. Clarke A. Chambers, *Seedtime of Reform: American Social Service and Social Action, 1918-1933* (Minneapolis, 1963), 14. See also Jane Addams, *Forty Years at Hull House* (New York, 1935); Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890 to 1914* (New York, 1967); Josephine Goldmark, *Impatient Crusader: Florence Kelley's Life Story* (Urbana, IL, 1953); Colleen Leahy Johnson, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Italian-American Families* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1985); Christopher Lasch, ed., *The Social Thought of Jane Addams* (New York, 1965); Salvatore J. LaGumina, *The Immigrants Speak: Italian Americans Tell Their Story* (New York, 1979); Judith Ann Trolander, *Settlement Houses and the Great Depression* (Detroit, 1975); idem, *Professionalism and Social Change: From the Settlement House Movement to Neighborhood Centers, 1886 to the Present* (New York, 1987).

3. *Sioux City Journal*, 13 December 1945, 3 January 1926.

4. *Sioux City Journal*, 13 December 1945, 13 October 1940; "Sioux City Girl in Movies," newspaper clipping, Mary J. Treglia Scrapbook, Mary J. Treglia Community House, Sioux City.

5. Lillian Wald, *The House on Henry Street* (New York, 1915), 7.

ing of ethnic traditions and family relationships did not come from a sociology class; it was part of her life as a child. She understood poverty and the problems of immigrants, not as an outsider who arrived to share the plight of the disadvantaged, but as one who had shared their problems.

Even though Treglia's life prepared her in many ways for work at the Community House, she lacked the academic credentials that had become important in settlement work. In 1922 she began to fill that gap in her experience. After taking a special course that year at the University of Minnesota, she spent a year doing course work and field work at the New York School of Social Work and another year working at United Charities in Chicago before enrolling at Morningside College in Sioux City in 1925. Named executive director of the Community House that year, her new responsibilities competed with her academic work. Nevertheless, she enrolled regularly in classes, finally completing the requirements to earn her bachelor's degree in 1933.⁶

Pressure to complete her undergraduate work probably came from the professionalization of settlement house work. When Jane Addams of Chicago's Hull House and Lillian Wald of New York's Henry Street House began their work, goodwill and a reform spirit provided the essential qualifications. By the 1920s when Treglia began her work, however, the field had begun to discriminate between trained professionals and volunteers who wanted to help the destitute. Treglia may have been working to meet the professional standard through her undergraduate work. Eventually, she earned a reputation as a leader in her professional community. In 1942 she was elected president of the Iowa branch of the American Association of Social Workers, and from 1947 until 1951 she served on the board of directors of the National Federation of Settlements.⁷

6. Transcript, Morningside College, Sioux City; "Sioux City Girl, Original Feminine Baseball Umpire, to Devote Life to Social Work," newspaper clipping, Mary J. Treglia Scrapbook.

7. *Sioux City Journal*, 18 December 1942, 14 September 1943, 28 September 1947. Newspaper accounts only announce her election, they do not elaborate on her activities as president. According to information found at the Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, the records

Treglia's quest to complete her undergraduate work suggests one way she differed from other Italian-American women in the 1920s. Many Italian-American parents who needed the income their children could earn as workers denied their children even the opportunity to complete high school. In traditional Italian-American homes the father served as the head of the household, making most of the decisions and interpreting the world to his family. In Mary's untraditional family, her mother performed both that role and her own traditional one. Perhaps because Mary and her mother, Rose, lived in a city with a small Italian community, and because Rose assumed the father's economic responsibility for herself and her daughter, tradition may have influenced fewer of Mary's life decisions than might be expected otherwise. In addition, Mary's choice of a career over marriage and family separated her from other Italian-American women who chose a more traditional lifestyle. While Mary's pride in her ethnic background remained steadfast throughout her life, she freed herself from the constraints it placed on other women.⁸

THE SIOUX CITY COMMUNITY HOUSE, where Mary Treglia worked, had opened in April 1921. The local YWCA, with the help of Bertha Clark, a representative of that group's national board, sponsored the development of the Community House. Clark surveyed the city's East Side, finding over twenty different nationalities represented, including Russians, Italians, Lithuanians, Greeks, and Syrians. The ethnic diversity contributed to the sense of isolation that Clark also discovered. With the goal of providing a social gathering place, Clark recom-

of the Iowa organization of the American Association of Social Workers were stored at the Department of Social Welfare in Des Moines, but personnel at the Department of Human Resources and the state archives could not find them. See also Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880-1930* (Cambridge, MA, 1965), 140-47, and Chambers, *Seedtime of Reform*, 14.

8. Humber S. Nelli, *From Immigrants to Ethnic: The Italian Americans* (New York, 1983), 132-33; Gary Ross Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill: Italian Americans in St. Louis, 1882-1982* (Urbana, IL, 1986), 108-12; Humbert S. Nelli, *Italians in Chicago, 1880-1930: A Study in Ethnic Mobility* (New York, 1970); Colleen Leahy Johnson, *Growing Up and Growing Old in Italian-American Families* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1985).

mended that local leaders open a facility to meet those needs. Social and religious groups responded to Clark's recommendation by renting and furnishing the second floor of a building at 1604 East Fourth Street. They hired Dorothy Anderson, the only paid staff member, to serve as the center's director. Within a year, the center employed Mary Treglia as Anderson's assistant. When Anderson left Sioux City in 1925, Treglia became the center's director.⁹

Early in her career, Mary Treglia announced to the press that she expected "to make it my life work to help foreign born people become familiar with our language and our customs and Americanized with the same degree of hope and ambition for the prosperity of this country that the best native born Americans have."¹⁰ That statement certainly reflected a part of her goal for the Community House, but with Treglia as executive director the center came to serve many other needs of its neighbors through her emphasis on clubs, educational programs, and casework.

Treglia had her first experience organizing a club within the settlement while serving as a volunteer. After attending the opening of the Community House, Treglia offered to start a club for working girls. The club, made up of employed young women of several nationalities, continued to make significant contributions to the life of the Community House over the years.¹¹

That experience was an appropriate introduction to settlement house work. The Community House, like other settlement houses, organized clubs for girls, boys, women, and men, according to the age and interests of the participants, as a means of allocating staff resources as well as time and space within the facility. According to the head of New York's Univer-

9. Mabel Hoyt, "History of Community House, Sioux City, Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 21 (January 1938), 190-91; Bertha Clark, Visitation Reports, 16 February-9 March 1921, YWCA National Board Archives, New York. Unfortunately, the survey Clark directed has been lost. When Mabel Hoyt wrote her history of the Community House in 1938, the survey had already disappeared.

10. "Sioux City Girl, Original Feminine Baseball Umpire, to Devote Life to Social Work," newspaper clipping, Mary J. Treglia Scrapbook.

11. *Sioux City Journal*, 13 October 1940, 3 January 1926.

sity Settlement in the 1930s and 1940s, "The club is probably the sole activity which is common to all settlements. It stands for association in its purest form. The members of the settlement club meet on the basis of personal interest in each other and the quality of good-fellowship for which they feel toward each other. . . . It lives only so long as members find association rewarding and desirable."¹² Some clubs, like the first one Treglia founded, lasted for years; others lasted only a season or two.

The Women of All Nations Club, which lasted for decades, served the mothers of the neighborhood. The club held special interest for Rose Treglia, Mary's mother, who would go door-to-door, encouraging women to participate. She worked to convince many skeptical husbands that the whole family would benefit from his wife's exposure to the opportunities the Community House offered. According to a newspaper article, Rose knew "personally nearly every person in the district served by the [Community] house. . . . [She] spends most of each day visiting in the homes of its members, carrying cheer and goodwill to mothers of various nationalities who have adopted this country as their new home." Mary Treglia herself saw her mother's friendly visits as a "means of strengthening the bond of confidence between the people and the Community House."¹³

Mary Treglia acknowledged that the women's diverse backgrounds presented a challenge. "It took much diplomacy," a coworker noted, "to have Jews and Gentiles work together, to have Mohammedans and Christians sit at the same table, and women in clubs exchange recipes for Irish stew and Italian spaghetti." But by 1932 she was expressing pleasure at the members' increasing independence and their efforts to learn parliamentary procedure. She also acknowledged their help in the general program of the Community House.¹⁴

12. Fred S. Hall, ed., *Social Work Year Book, 1929* (New York, 1930), 427. See also Lillian Wald, *The House on Henry Street* (New York, 1915), 179-80.

13. Audra Cole, relative of Mary Treglia, interview with author, Sioux City, 2 October 1986; *Sioux City Tribune*, 3 January 1930; Community House Annual Report, September 1925, Mary J. Treglia Community House, Sioux City.

14. Hoyt, "History of Community House," 194.

Treglia may have found joy and a sense of accomplishment in the Women of All Nations Club, but the young boys who came to the settlement house were an even greater challenge. Scout troops were a mainstay at the Community House, but some of the boys did not fit there. The boys, sent by the courts to Treglia for guidance, organized into groups such as the Aces, the Galloping Cossacks, and the White Skulls. But they continued to give her trouble, and she had difficulty finding permanent leaders for them.¹⁵

Treglia's comments about these groups in her annual reports were often amusing. This may represent a deliberate tactic, designed to make the boys seem more childlike and less threatening than the juvenile delinquents that some of them were. She reported that boys who had trouble with the courts behaved well at the Friday night dances, and others worked off excess energy at the gym. The tone of her reports was optimistic, and her responses indicate her flexibility, her willingness to try new approaches, and her attempts to keep the boys involved in Community House activities.¹⁶

Of course, Treglia was also obliged to minimize problems in her reports to the board of directors. Like the boards of many other settlement houses, the board members of the Community House came from outside the settlement neighborhood, and they tended to be wealthier members of the community. At least one board member contributed regularly and substantially to the agency's budget. Certainly Treglia would not want to appear unable to control a group of unruly boys.¹⁷

The Community House also offered programs for girls, including a Homemakers Club, an Art Club, and the Dramatics Club. One program, Little Sisters/Big Sisters, paired trained adult volunteers with high-school aged girls. Through the program, adults hoped to prevent delinquency by providing help with problems and opportunities for education and employ-

15. Annual Report, April 1934. In the annual report from which this material came, Treglia did not identify which court referred the boys to her.

16. Annual Reports, September 1925, April 1934, April 1936, April 1937; *Sioux City Tribune*, 9 September 1931.

17. See Judith Ann Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change: From the Settlement House Movement to Neighborhood Centers, 1886 to the Present* (New York, 1987), 10.

ment. The program also helped girls in trouble with the law. In 1930, for example, the juvenile courts referred thirty-nine girls to the program. At the end of the year, twenty-three of the cases had been closed. Some of the girls secured employment; others received help with material and social needs; and two of them earned college scholarships.¹⁸

Treglia was proud of her youth programs. In one instance she claimed that the Halloween parties sponsored by the Community House transformed the surrounding neighborhood from "one of the most troublesome in the city" on Halloween into a neighborhood that was "conspicuous in a constructive way."¹⁹

The Community House did not have regularly scheduled and organized programs specifically for men. Neighborhood men became involved in the settlement by participating in Americanization classes and by attending social events planned by groups such as the Women of All Nations Club. When the neighborhood men did organize, they generally did so to remedy a specific problem, and when they solved the problem, they disbanded. One men's group, the East Side Improvement Organization, formed in 1931, worked to enhance the appearance of the neighborhood. They petitioned the police to tear down an abandoned building that Treglia described as "a rendezvous for tramps and a breeding place of crime." Reorganized in 1933 as the East Side Social Club, the group worked with the police to eradicate prostitution from the area. Less certain of their success than club members, Treglia commented about the group, "They have the perception at least that they cleaned up the prostitution."²⁰

Both men and women participated in the Americanization classes at the Community House. Americanization was one of the primary goals of the Sioux City Community House organizers, as indicated by the name of the local YWCA committee, the Americanization Committee. In the most general and benevolent terms, Americanization meant teaching immigrants

18. *Sioux City Tribune*, 14 January 1931. The newspaper article did not report which court referred the girls to Treglia.

19. Annual Report, April 1936.

20. Annual Reports, April 1932, April 1934.

English, instructing them in American government and history, and helping them become naturalized citizens. Generally, settlement house workers such as Jane Addams and Lillian Wald nurtured this helpful attitude, combining it with a respect for the diversity and richness of ethnic heritages.²¹

The Community House held classes during the day and at night (sometimes in other places) to teach citizenship to the immigrants. English, reading, writing, conversation, current events, and citizenship classes were all parts of the program. The program had another side, however, as teachers and board members also taught the immigrants, women in particular, American ways of dressing, cooking, and thinking. The number of people enrolled in the classes varied from year to year: in 1931 fifty-five people studied for citizenship under one teacher and eight volunteers; in 1938, 251 adults ranging in age from sixteen to eighty-two participated in classes. The students' diversity fascinated Treglia. She reported that the 1938-39 classes included "a Lithuanian boy who had come to the U.S. all alone, a beautiful Greek girl who had come to Sioux City as a bride, and an attractive Italian girl who had not seen her father since she was a baby . . . a Greek with all of the personality, charm, and philosophy of a modern Plato, a Chinese boy who not long ago saw Hong Kong bombed, and a handsome and scholarly young Jewish rabbi whose keen sense of humor and deep wisdom has been an inspiration to all who have come in contact with him."²²

Besides offering naturalization classes, the Community House staff also completed naturalization papers for immigrants, and Treglia sometimes served as a witness for naturalization candidates. Describing her feelings about her work with immigrants in 1931, Treglia observed, "It is gratifying to have these men and women who for the most part are engaged in industrial work coming twice a week to study English and to see them gradually and sanely assimilated."²³

21. Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House, with Autobiographical Notes* (1910; reprint, New York, 1981), 177-78; Wald, *The House on Henry Street*, 206-7.

22. Hoyt, "History of Community House," 195; Annual Reports, September 1925, April 1939.

23. *Sioux City Tribune*, 9 September 1931.

The citizenship services became even more effective in 1937 when the Department of Immigration and Naturalization agreed to give the Community House the names of those seeking citizenship at the time they first declared their intent. Treglia had paved the way for the agreement by going to Washington, D.C., to meet with government officials. She argued that "building citizenship was a long time process and that memorizing answers to questions on government was no assurance that the person who could answer credibly was to be an asset to our country. Rather we felt that if we could inculcate a philosophy over the three- to five-year period, help the candidate to read the newspapers intelligently and to listen judiciously to speakers who might influence him that we would be doing a more thorough piece of work and offering a greater contribution to American society."²⁴

In 1941 Treglia felt that the biggest contribution the Community House had made to the community was helping immigrants comply with a government order requiring all aliens to register. Treglia reported that the Community House staff helped more than 350 immigrants during the period of registration, filling out preliminary papers, rendering interpretive services, assisting with fingerprinting, and generally doing everything in their power to see that everyone registered. Still, according to Treglia, "This routine work was only a small part in comparison with the necessary education of the foreign-born to the innovation and the allaying of their fears."²⁵

In addition to the clubs and the educational programs, the Community House served its neighbors through case work, helping individuals with problems. Community House staff arbitrated neighborhood quarrels, distributed clothing, thwarted potential suicides, and offered advice on legal matters, immigration, citizenship, medical care, hospitalization, funeral arrangements, domestic difficulties, child marriages, and pre- and post-natal care. Treglia explained that because of the language barrier, immigrants often asked her agency for help even when other resources were available. She also suggested that "they perhaps feel that there is a more sympathetic

24. Annual Report, April 1937.

25. Annual Report, April 1941.

understanding of their conditions and surroundings by people familiar with them."²⁶

Treglia did not hesitate to intervene in family relationships, but she did so with a sensitivity to the family's values. When a man who physically abused his family came to Treglia's attention, she urged him, upon finding him rummaging through some books, to look up hard words and take them home for his family to pronounce and define. She reported, "He did and has never beaten any member of his family since. Instead, he propounds questions to them which they cannot answer and that satisfies his desire to assert his superiority in his own family. Previously he has used physical strength for the same purpose."²⁷

Her sensitivity to traditional values did not always mean acquiescence, however. She strongly supported one fourteen-year-old girl's resistance to an arranged marriage. Acknowledging that it was the custom in Italy for girls to be married young, she nevertheless argued that "there should be legislation to prevent little girls from being married until they are 16." Without exaggeration or unreasonable criticism of the mother, Treglia focused on understanding the child's needs while interpreting them in light of the traditions of the Italian family.²⁸

Area residents tried to solve neighborhood problems such as illegal gambling, bootlegging, and prostitution through the Community House as well. These problems existed throughout Sioux City in the 1920s and 1930s, but certainly the Community House neighborhood was no exception.²⁹ The seemingly casual acceptance of prostitution in the area may indicate that it

26. Annual Report, 1926.

27. "Family Beater Changed Attack to Tough Words," newspaper clipping, Mary J. Treglia Scrapbook.

28. "Proposed Marriage of 14-Year-Old Girl is Opposed by Teacher and Community Worker," newspaper clipping, Mary J. Treglia Scrapbook.

29. Scott Sorensen and B. Paul Chicoine, *Sioux City: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk, VA, 1982), 41. The East Side Improvement Organization and other groups from the Community House attempted to rid the area of bootlegging, but the problem remained until the neighborhood became part of an urban renewal project in the 1960s and the housing was replaced with more legally acceptable businesses. For examples of reports of bootlegging and prostitution in the neighborhood, see *Sioux City Tribune*, 5 January 1923, 9 September, 29, 30 October 1931.

was a part of neighborhood life. And bootlegging, especially during the depression, provided a way to earn money when other opportunities were limited. For immigrants on Sioux City's East Side, as for the Italians on the Hill in St. Louis, the clandestine aspects of the liquor trade were only an inconvenience, not a moral issue; employment in the trade itself may have been acceptable in the Community House neighborhood. As for Treglia herself, a friend believes that she did not condone such activities in the Community House neighborhood, but she may have been resigned to their existence.³⁰

Solutions to these and other problems required support from the larger community, and in some cases Treglia ably marshaled such support. Her "Help Fight Hard Luck" campaign in 1931-1932 provides one example. In August 1931 unemployed people on Sioux City's East Side experienced the same anxiety at the thought of the oncoming winter as people felt across the nation. Treglia responded with a campaign to find jobs for Sioux City's unemployed. She kept files on their abilities and needs, and a local newspaper supported the project by using the files to publish case histories of job seekers and advertise their abilities. Between August 1931 and April 1932 Community House personnel found jobs for 782 unemployed persons. The next year they found 739 jobs, and in 1934, 651 jobs.³¹ Although not all of the jobs were permanent positions, the campaign suggests Treglia's resourcefulness and ability to use the press and the larger community to the advantage of the Community House clientele. In the years to come Treglia took advantage of those skills in her efforts to resolve cases of conflict between the Community House neighbors and the larger community.

Beginning in 1933 Mary Treglia served the citizens of Sioux City in yet another way. In that year she helped organize the Booker T. Washington Center, later known as the Sanford Center, on the city's West Side. At a gathering in October 1933,

30. Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill*, 108-12; Robert Eldredge, former director of Parks and Recreation in Sioux City, interview with author, Des Moines, 26 June 1987.

31. *Sioux City Tribune*, 29 August 1931; Annual Reports, April 1933, April 1935.

Treglia, community leaders, and representatives of various black women's clubs met with a black men's club to explore ways to provide a social gathering place for the city's black residents. During the meeting the group elected officers, including Treglia as executive supervisor.³²

Once under way, the Washington Center's program quickly expanded to include an educational program, a nursery school, and a black servicemen's center. In less than a year, the center's educational program began to include classes in music appreciation, public speaking, shorthand, history, science, and English. In 1936 the center opened a preschool nursery to care for the children of working mothers. Although opened to serve primarily black people in Sioux City, white people, particularly children, also used the facility, making the center a resource for all of the area residents.³³

The daily operation of the center was the responsibility of the executive director, Elzona Trosper, but Treglia, as executive supervisor of the center, helped to develop programs and assisted with general administration. Stella Sanford, who was active in the Community House, also played an important role in the Washington Center. In 1951 Stella and Arthur Sanford financed and Treglia supervised the construction of a new facility for the center. Billed as the most modern community center of its kind in the United States, the new larger building allowed more opportunities for recreation, education, and social gatherings. In recognition of the Sanfords' support of the center, the board of directors renamed the facility in their honor.³⁴

Although the Community House and Washington Center had separate boards and budgets, Treglia occasionally reported the activities of the Washington Center in her annual reports to the Community House board of directors. In the April 1943 annual report, for example, Treglia described a new service that the center had developed for black servicemen. During World War II, 750 black soldiers were stationed at the Sioux City air

32. *Sioux City Journal*, 10 June 1951; Betty Huntington, "Booker T. Washington Center," newspaper clipping, n.d., Sioux City Public Library, Sioux City.

33. *Sioux City Journal*, 10 June 1951.

34. *Ibid.*



Mary Treglia was honored when the Sanford Community Center celebrated its twentieth anniversary on October 23, 1953. Elzona Trosper, the center's executive director, is seated at left. The others, all longtime leaders or advisers of the center, are (l. to r.) Mabel Hoyt, Treglia's longtime associate, Beulah Webb, and Caroline Kriege. Courtesy of Sioux City Journal.

base. Racial prejudice prohibited the black soldiers from using the community's recreational facilities; as a result, military officials restricted the black soldiers to the air base. At the request of a local army official, the Washington Center opened a servicemen's center. The center's staff and volunteers decorated and furnished a room on the center's ground floor for the men. A notice in the air base newspaper expressed the servicemen's appreciation for the center: "The Booker T. Washington is doing a swell job and we want them to know that the boys of the 93rd Squadron really appreciate the efforts of the association." Treglia called the project at the Washington Center unique for Sioux City and rare in the United States, an opinion recent scholarship supports.³⁵

Mary Treglia's leadership as one of the organizers and as the executive supervisor of the Washington Center demonstrates her interest in providing educational and recreational programs for Sioux City's black people. At the same time, how-

35. Annual Report, April 1943; Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, 22.

ever, she seems to have accepted racial segregation. For example, although the Washington Center provided a gathering place for black servicemen, the real problem was the racial discrimination that prohibited the servicemen from using the city's public facilities.

The acceptance of segregation extended to activities at the Community House. In her annual reports, Treglia praised the growth of the Women of All Nations Club, but when a group of black women wanted to join the club, she resisted. On the premise that the Women of All Nations Club had almost filled its membership (no limits had been mentioned earlier), she suggested that the black women form their own club. The resulting group, the Negro Women's Club, did not purport to be an inclusive organization. Even the name, Negro Women's Club, especially when compared to an inclusive club name like Women of All Nations, suggests separation and isolation. The leadership Treglia and her mother provided to the "women of all nations" apparently did not extend to women of all races.³⁶

Settlement houses in other parts of the country also had difficulty integrating their agencies in the 1930s and 1940s. When they did try to integrate, white neighbors often would quit using the facility, resulting either in the suspension of services to blacks or in segregated services. Another Iowa settlement house, Roadside Settlement in Des Moines, for example, offered both segregated and integrated clubs, but the integrated groups suffered from racial clashes. One solution included establishing a separate center for blacks in another part of the city. In general, settlement houses relented to the racial prejudices of whites and did not successfully convince white residents to accept more tolerant views. In contrast to Sioux City, most settlements did not successfully attract donors to support settlement houses in black neighborhoods; the Sanfords' financial support of a center for blacks appears to be unusual.³⁷

Attempts at reform and the wide variety of clubs, programs, educational classwork, and casework services offered at the Community House, on the other hand, were typical of the

36. Annual Report, April 1939.

37. Flora Dunlap, "Roadside Settlement of Des Moines," *Annals of Iowa* 21 (January 1938), 172, 186-89; Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, 22.

work done at other settlement houses. In 1910 Jane Addams described clubs for women, girls, boys, and men at Hull House in Chicago. The programs offered at the Sioux City agency in the 1920s and 1930s served many of the same purposes. Both settlements sought ways to help first- and second-generation Americans learn the language, customs, and social skills of their adopted country. Treglia and Addams acknowledged the potential contributions that immigrants could make to their new communities as individuals and as ethnic groups, but they emphasized Americanizing the immigrant rather than incorporating attributes of foreign cultures into American life. Both settlement directors honored the traditions, skills, and crafts of the other countries, but only as museum pieces to be observed and admired. The traditions and skills of the immigrants may have been charming, but from the perspective of settlement house workers, they were irrelevant to life in contemporary America.

Nevertheless, Mary Treglia earned the respect of neighborhood residents through her work at the Community House. Several of the programs she launched also gave her valuable experience in dealing with prominent citizens in the larger community. Her experience and the respect it earned her served her well when those two groups came into conflict.

MARY TREGLIA'S SUCCESS as the Community House director provided a base from which she could act as a neighborhood advocate, community leader, and mediator in conflicts between the settlement house community and the larger community. Her public comments on the conflicts emphasized her mediating role and the lessons in citizenship that neighborhood residents learned through participation in the process of resolving the conflicts.

Two conflicts between neighborhood residents and the Sioux City Board of Education illustrate Treglia's ability to serve as an advocate for the interests of area residents and to mediate differences between the neighborhood and the local government. In 1929 and 1930, Treglia helped the parents of area children fight the closing of a neighborhood school, and then in 1939 and 1940, she worked to convince the school board to honor a transportation agreement it had made with area residents in the earlier dispute.

The first controversy between the Sioux City Board of Education and East Side residents developed when the board proposed closing Lincoln School in 1929. The board cited three reasons for closing Lincoln: the building had poor lighting and ventilation, it had become a fire hazard, and the student population had dropped. Opposition came from the school's alumni and area businessmen who expressed concern about the children's safety walking between home and the new school: they would have to cross railroad tracks on their route. After six weeks of debate, the school board decided on July 1, 1929, to close Lincoln and send the children to other schools by bus.³⁸

Residents in the Lincoln School neighborhood wanted the school kept open, and found the offer to transport the children unacceptable. Five hundred residents met on July 8 in Anderson Park, near the school, to protest the school closing and to organize to prevent the school board from carrying out the proposal. The day after the protest march, parents met to decide their next action. Within a week, the parents obtained a temporary injunction preventing the board from razing or dismantling the building.³⁹

Hearings and appeals continued for more than a year, until November 11, 1930, when Agnes Samuelson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, decided to allow the school board to close Lincoln School. Parents responded to the news with a school strike. On Saturday, November 22, 245 students and their parents marched, singing school songs and beating oil drums with tree branches and laths. Mary Treglia took part in the activities, and later told a reporter that citizens wanted the school to remain open because of the "influence which it lent to neighborhood life." Nevertheless, when the parents met again to decide their next action, Mary urged them to end the strike. The children returned to school on Monday, November 24, not at Lincoln, but at Irving, Hobson, and Franklin.⁴⁰

38. Minutes, Sioux City Board of Education, 1 July 1929; *Sioux City Tribune*, 2 July 1929.

39. *Sioux City Journal*, 10 July 1929; *Sioux City Tribune*, 16 July 1929; Minutes, Sioux City Board of Education, 15 July 1929.

40. Minutes, Sioux City Board of Education, 11 November 1930; *Sioux City Journal*, 21, 23, 24, 25 November 1930.

Area residents did not accept defeat, however. They organized the East Side Improvement Club to promote better understanding between residents of the East Side and the rest of the community. Club members hoped that the better understanding would result in the construction of a new school to replace Lincoln. A newspaper account reported, "Community House officials have advised the league leaders on the ways and means of obtaining their objectives in an orderly, amicable manner." The campaign to convince the school board to construct a new building did not succeed, however.⁴¹

Even though the school board closed Lincoln School, Treglia's report to the Community House board of directors included a note of optimism. She felt that through the period of strife and unrest, the neighborhood had been welded together, reflecting other settlement workers' goal that centers should be a unifying force in a community. She credited the Community House leadership with ending the school strike and guiding residents to a better understanding of citizenship. She hoped that the East Side Improvement Organization would continue, but with the new goal of cleaning and beautifying the area.⁴²

Treglia's comments suggest the gravity of the school strike. Not all Americans shared the benign attitudes toward immigrants held by Treglia and other settlement house workers. Characterized by fear and hatred of foreigners, xenophobia played a malevolent role in some actions toward immigrants. During the 1920s as well as earlier, Catholics, Jews, Italians, Irish, and others had been the victims of public hatred and attacks. Even though fear and hatred of foreigners had faded somewhat by the late 1920s, a school strike even in 1930 by Russian, Italian, and Syrian immigrants must have been threatening. Gatherings of five hundred foreign-born people agitating for their rights and accusing the school board of unfair action were not likely the ways that Community House organizers had hoped immigrants would become Americanized.

41. *Sioux City Journal*, 24 November 1930; *Sioux City Tribune*, 14 January 1931.

42. Annual Report, April 1931; Don S. Kirschner, *The Paradox of Professionalism: Reform and Public Service in Urban America, 1900-1940* (New York, 1986), 45.

The sight and sound of immigrants and their children parading through Sioux City's business district beating on oil drums surely must have alarmed some citizens.⁴³

Through her leadership, Treglia turned a period of potentially serious conflict into an object lesson in citizenship; she transformed a school strike into a club to beautify the neighborhood. Her solution was appeasement, an approach characteristic of settlement workers. She did not organize the strike or in any visible way support it. Rather, she turned the strikers' interest away from the strike, substituting another goal—cleaning up the neighborhood. The funding sources for the Community House—wealthy supporters and the Community Chest—may have created subtle or camouflaged pressure to end the controversy. Settlement houses in other communities found themselves vulnerable to such pressures, so settlement workers often found it in their best interests to mediate and conciliate rather than to organize and insist on more radical solutions.⁴⁴

Ten years after the conflict with the school board in 1929 and 1930, parents in the old Lincoln School district had cause to renew earlier expressions of concern about their children's safety. When Lincoln School closed in 1930, the school board assigned the children to schools farther from home. The route between the childrens' homes and the new schools included hazards such as railroad tracks. The board had overcome those problems by providing bus transportation. At the July 17, 1939, school board meeting, however, board members eliminated two of the three bus routes serving children from the former Lincoln School district. Board members explained that in most parts of the city, children receiving transportation to school lived at least 1½ miles from their building; thus it was unfair to transport the Lincoln area children, who lived much shorter distances from their buildings.⁴⁵

In response to the withdrawal of bus transportation, about one hundred mothers met at the Community House to protest

43. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1955).

44. Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, 20.

45. Minutes, Sioux City Board of Education, 17 July 1939; *Sioux City Tribune*, 7 September 1939.

and to organize a strike. One mother described her son's confusion: "When my little boy came home, he said that a train was on the tracks and he thought he ought to crawl under it. He didn't know he should wait." Another mother added, "My little boy, who's 5, is too young to find his way home. I told him to wait for his older sister, but the school teachers said he couldn't wait on the school grounds. So he had to wait under the viaduct." In addition to the hazards posed by the railroad tracks, houses of prostitution and gathering places for vagrants lay between the children's homes and their schools.⁴⁶

As they had done during the earlier conflict with the school board, the residents appointed a committee to work with the board of education. The committee asked Mary Treglia to be their intermediary with the school board. Despite several meetings with the school board, the strike continued.⁴⁷

On September 21, however, the school controversy entered a new phase when a group of downtown businessmen became involved because "they did not wish the city's community feeling to suffer or children to be deprived of schooling." The group offered to pay for bus transportation for children in kindergarten through second grade until a permanent solution to the problem was found. The board and the neighborhood parents approved the plan, and the children returned to school. On March 3, 1940, only a few days before the special winter bus service provided by the school board was to end, the board voted to continue the service for the rest of the year.⁴⁸

Mary Treglia played an active role throughout the controversy: she attended the school board meetings, and parents held their meetings at her agency. Despite her involvement, she told reporters in the midst of the controversy that she "wished to keep a 'middle-of-the road' position," though she hoped that

46. *Sioux City Journal*, 8 September 1939; *Sioux City Tribune*, 9 September 1939.

47. *Sioux City Journal*, 8, 12 September 1939; *Sioux City Tribune*, 9 September 1939; Minutes, Sioux City Board of Education, 11, 12, 13, 18 September 1939.

48. *Sioux City Journal*, 21, 26 September 1939; Minutes, Sioux City Board of Education, 25 September 1939, 3 March 1940. The businessmen who offered to help by providing bus service were not identified in the newspaper article; they intended to be anonymous.

the board would order the resumption of bus service until a settlement could be reached. Later, summarizing the controversy for her own board of trustees, she praised the East Side residents without any attempt to claim credit, glory, or even attention for herself. Even though Treglia probably solicited the businessmen's help in finding the solution that ended the stalemate and led to a resolution of the disagreement, she gave the credit for solving the conflict to the East Side residents. Treglia commended the Community House neighbors for their democratic spirit, their desire to negotiate a solution, and their determination to fight for their interests. Her evaluation seems tame in light of a twenty-day school strike involving emotional mass meetings where community relations became so strained that local businessmen raised money to ameliorate the conflict.⁴⁹

This school controversy exemplifies another aspect of settlement house work, the effort to promote cooperation among several groups in the larger community. Treglia served as a bridge connecting local businessmen, school board members, and East Side residents. As people moved into class-stratified neighborhoods, living apart from each other, they lost contact with the causes and concerns of areas other than their own. Treglia provided a line of communication between the various interests, which represented in effect different social and economic classes in the city: the poor people of the East Side and the businessmen and school board members who primarily came from less impoverished areas. As in the controversy a decade earlier, Treglia did not serve as a strike leader or organizer; instead she looked for a moderate position and waited for the opportunity to serve as a conciliator.⁵⁰

Residents who lived in the area surrounding the Community House remained interested in the school board even after the transportation controversy was resolved. Their interest paid major dividends when they discovered a secret organization known as the Past President's Club. This powerful group selected and then sponsored consistently successful school board candidates, in effect making the Sioux City school board a self-perpetuating organization that controlled educational

49. *Sioux City Journal*, 12 September 1939; Annual Report, April 1940.

50. Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, 18.

policy in Sioux City for scores of years. Describing the action taken by East Side residents, Treglia reported the effects of the Community House work: "As a result of the attention focused on this problem, and a carefully planned campaign, the political dynasty that had controlled the local School Board was broken, and independent candidates were elected to the Board." Treglia also described the successful candidates supported by voters in the Community House neighborhood: "Both were elected: one, the retired school principal; the other, the Jewish president of the Settlement Board. And this in a town that had never before elected a Catholic or a Jew to office."⁵¹

The individual identified as Jewish, Stella Sanford, was elected to the school board in 1943 and served until 1948. The East Side community knew Sanford from her years as a Community House board member and president. In addition, her husband Arthur's many business and social activities heightened her visibility in the community. In her comments regarding Stella's election to the school board, Treglia clearly indicated that Stella had her support. Treglia's endorsement meant votes for a candidate. After years of solving hundreds of problems for hundreds of people, she had earned the loyalty, gratitude, trust, and affection of those people. Immigrants who studied for citizenship at the Community House and others in the community who felt her impact shared those feelings, feelings that translated into a solid block of votes. Treglia was not, however, a traditional ward boss handing out favors for votes; rather, she was a community leader who through years of service earned the fealty of a group of people who otherwise might not have been able to make their needs and concerns known to outsiders.⁵²

51. Mary J. Treglia, "The Settlement as a Vital Force in Community Organization," 3, in *Minutes, Objectives and Methods in Social Education and Action Committee*, National Federation of Settlements, 17 May 1946, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

52. *Sioux City Tribune*, 15 April 1936; *Sioux City Journal*, 10 June 1951; *The Story of Iowa: The Progress of an American State*, 4 vols. (New York, 1952), 4: 1323-24; Robert Eldredge interview; Charlotte Ressegiu, friend of Mary Treglia, interview with author, Sioux City, 6 July 1987; Ruth Eldredge, friend of Mary Treglia, interview with author, Sioux City, 12 June 1987.

Treglia's ability to influence voting contributed to another aspect of her power and influence. She became the person that the city's leaders sought out for assistance in solving problems on the East Side. Officials in the parks department, in law enforcement, and in city government communicated with the neighborhood through Treglia. She became the unofficial, but effective, representative of the immigrant community as well as the Community House neighborhood. This position, the intermediary between the larger community and the immigrant neighborhood, enhanced her power and her ability to negotiate successfully on behalf of the group she represented. Her role as intermediary was also valued by those outside the neighborhood as they attempted to work with the people in it. In Sioux City, as in other communities, settlement workers provided a means for the wealthier members of the city to influence the life and activities of people in the agency's neighborhood.⁵³

MARY TREGLIA faced other challenges in the years between the two school board conflicts. In 1932 the city condemned the facility at 1604 East Fourth Street, the home of the Community House since its beginning. In addition to securing a new home for the agency, Mary worked to find solutions to end a major community problem, the persistent flooding of the Floyd River. Trying to solve these problems during the depression was not a simple task. Eligibility for financial assistance for labor through various work relief programs, however, eased some of the difficulties.

As early as September 1925 Mary had noted the inadequacy of the agency's original facility above the Edwards and Browne Coal Company. Seven years passed, however, before the board of directors took action. When the city condemned the Community House facility in 1932, the board was forced to begin plans for a new building. After an unsuccessful search for a new location, the board considered but rejected the possibility of closing the Community House. Instead, the board appointed Stella Sanford to head a committee to find a location for a new

53. Robert Eldredge interview; Trolander, *Professionalism and Social Change*, 12.



The original location of the Community House on the second floor of the Edwards and Browne Coal Company at 1604 Fourth Street is just out of the picture in the right foreground of this photograph of the 1934 flood. Courtesy of SCPM.

building. The committee had \$750 when they began planning, but lost that money in a bank failure.⁵⁴

New hope for the project emerged when the city gave the Community House the old Lincoln School site, prepared the building site, made the sewer and water connections, and donated other services and materials. To pay for the rest of the building, Treglia began a "Buy a Brick Campaign." The goal was six thousand dollars. Despite the depression, the effort met with a remarkable response. Mabel Hoyt, a longtime Community House volunteer, cited the community's familiarity with Mary Treglia as a major reason for the project's success. One man, for example, called the Community House and asked, "Is this Mary Treglia the one who used to play baseball so well?" When told it was the same person, he sent a check for twenty-five dollars. Mary also successfully solicited donations of mate-

54. Hoyt, "History of Community House," 200; *Sioux City Journal*, 14 April 1946.



The Community House, 1934. Courtesy of Woodworth Commercial Photos.

rials from various individuals and businesses, salvaging everything from stair railings to fireplace fixtures from condemned buildings.⁵⁵

In November 1933 the Community House staff moved into the unfinished building. The walls were not plastered, the heating unit was not installed, but the citizenship classes met in the lobby and sat on carpenter's benches. With the installation of the gym floor, workers completed work on the building in early June 1934.⁵⁶

The excitement of finishing the new building evaporated when flood waters from the nearby Floyd River filled the gym, destroying the floor. After the flood water receded, Treglia described the gym as the "most unpleasant and saddest picture one could imagine. For days the stench was almost unbearable."⁵⁷

Floods like the one that ruined the Community House gym floor were a part of life for people in the Community House neighborhood. Leaders in Sioux City had been attempting to solve the problem of Floyd River flooding for years. Since 1926

55. *Sioux City Tribune*, 2 February, 24 April, 14 October 1933; *Sioux City Journal*, 4 February 1933; Hoyt, "History of Community House," 201; Annual Report, April 1934.

56. Hoyt, "History of Community House," 202-3.

57. Annual Report, April 1933.

various plans for straightening the riverbed had been prepared. Finally, in November 1935, newspaper headlines announced that a plan for the project had been completed and that work would start soon. The newspaper reporter did not camouflage his excitement over the prospect of controlling the Floyd River. "Rains may fall. Clouds may burst. But once the project has been completed residents may dwell within a radius of several blocks of the present snarling, snakelike stream without fear of a repetition of the flood of June, 1934, or any other previous overflow." Unfortunately, only a week after the enthusiastic article appeared, the delays began. Delays for clearing brush, obtaining deeds, getting the city council to act, and other obstacles became more characteristic of the project than progress.⁵⁸

When the Floyd left its banks again on March 7, 1936, Treglia opened the doors of the Community House at 4:30 a.m. to admit flood victims evacuated from their homes. Eventually forty families found lodging there. In the days following the flood, the Community House also provided clothing, typhoid inoculations, and other services to flood victims.⁵⁹

While the flood waters flowed around the Community House, Treglia called for action to prevent future flooding. In previous years residents of the neighborhood had asked her when the city was going to do something about the problem, but in 1936 there were more questioners, and they were more insistent. She pledged herself to finding a solution, and offered this explanation of the plight of the area residents:

58. A federal analyst classified as major the floods in 1876, 1881, 1892, 1926, 1930, 1932, 1934, 1936, and 1937; ten other floods between 1916 and 1937 were classified as minor. In about a dozen places within the city limits, the Floyd River made arcs of about 180 degrees before entering the Missouri River east of the downtown area. About the last five miles of the river are through residential and industrial areas, including the East Side. The area most often flooded included two churches, about five hundred homes, fifty industrial establishments, and several railway, streetcar, and street and highway bridges. The Floyd River is not the only river that has caused property damage and loss of life in Sioux City. The Missouri River, Big Sioux River, and Perry Creek have also flooded. War Department, *Report on Preliminary Examination on Flood Control, Floyd River* (Washington, DC, 1938), 3, 12-15; *Sioux City Tribune*, 20, 23 November 1935.

59. *Sioux City Tribune*, 29 February, 7 March 1936; War Department, *Report on Flood Control*, 9-11; *Sioux City Journal*, 14 March 1936; Annual Report, April 1937.

Their homes mean just as much to them as more pretentious homes in other residence districts mean to their occupants. Many of them own their homes and have wrapped up in them most of their capital. Yet, under present conditions, every spring they have to worry over the possibility of flood. All too often possibility becomes reality and they have to move out to save themselves and their families. Of course, this means serious damage to property and heavy expense. . . . It [the city] should do something to protect these people—and do it now.⁶⁰

The houses in the neighborhood were small, wooden, frame structures lining dirt streets. Low-income laborers settled in the area to take advantage of cheap land prices and attractive loan agreements. Home ownership appears to have been important to the residents of the settlement neighborhood. If immigrants in Sioux City had the same feelings toward their homes and home ownership as Italians in St. Louis, home ownership was one of their "chief objectives." Italians on the Hill invested in property instead of career advancement, and were willing to purchase inexpensive housing in unsettled areas to make that investment affordable. Owning the home, not its location, was the goal.⁶¹

In an effort to protect their homes, East Side residents organized under Treglia's leadership. She responded to delays in the flood control project by organizing, planning, and chairing meetings to demonstrate the extent of the frustrations of the people who lived in the Floyd River flood plain. Treglia used one of the Community House clubs, the Women of All Nations Club, as the organizational base for her efforts, and its members attracted other supporters, particularly the women's husbands and friends.⁶²

On April 15, 1936, 325 area residents gathered to question and to listen to John Naughton, Third District WPA administrator, and Sioux City Mayor W. D. Hayes. As a formal expression

60. *Sioux City Journal*, 10 March 1936.

61. Hoyt, "History of Community House," 192–93; Sorensen and Chicoine, *Sioux City*, 176; Mormino, *Immigrants on the Hill*, 118.

62. Hoyt, "History of Community House," 204; 27th Annual Conference Notebook, National Federation of Settlements, 16–18 June 1939, p. 19, Social Welfare History Archives.



This series of three photographs illustrates the character of Bottoms residences in the 1930s and the extent of flooding in 1934. All three photos courtesy of SCPM.

of discontent, meeting organizers gave the mayor a petition with 461 signatures. The group also appointed a committee of twelve, including Treglia and Mayor Hayes, to "dog the heels of city, state, and federal officials," and to "stay in constant communication with all responsible officials until the work is completed." Over the next 2½ years Treglia chaired 215 meetings on flood control, which Naughton and the mayor usually attended. At the meetings, East Side residents heard reports on the progress of the project, asked questions, and worked to convince the political leaders that the work needed to continue.⁶³

Treglia had two influential allies in the flood control project, Arthur Sanford and John Naughton. Sanford chaired the Chamber of Commerce Floyd River Flood Control Committee, and through that position negotiated agreements between the city and the WPA. A local newspaper credited Sanford with taking "pencil and paper and list[ing] the items on which the city and WPA leaders agreed to get the project going." His ability to identify problem areas, to get people to work together, and to solve problems made him an important asset in the effort. In addition, Sanford's social status, economic power, and community leadership must have been beneficial to Treglia as she pressed for action on the project. Also, Sanford had employed WPA administrator John Naughton until Naughton assumed the WPA duties. Naughton's position as administrator of the agency responsible for the river project made him crucial to the successful completion of the project, and his support certainly eased Treglia's task.⁶⁴

Mayor W. D. Hayes, another important ally of the project, lent the power, status, and influence of his office to the effort. By serving on the Community House flood control committee, he became an advocate of the project, making his support clear. Although he may have supported the flood control project because he was a responsible community leader, he certainly

63. *Sioux City Journal*, 10 March 1936; *Sioux City Tribune*, 16 April 1936; Treglia, "The Settlement as a Vital Force."

64. *Sioux City Tribune*, 16 July 1936; "Sioux Cityan Makes Good," newspaper clipping, 18 January 1942, Sioux City Public Library.

was also aware of the block of votes that Treglia could control.⁶⁵

World War II interrupted the progress on the Floyd River project, but the completed work appeared to end the flooding. The illusion that the Floyd River had been controlled ended with the disastrous flood in 1953. Following that flood, planners worked for six years designing a comprehensive flood control project. Since the completion of that project, the Floyd River appears to be controlled.

Treglia's role in the Floyd River flood control project again demonstrates her ability to focus the community's attention on a problem and to work with the Community House neighbors and with other Sioux City leaders toward a solution. As in other situations, she organized the East Side residents into committees, and held mass meetings to demonstrate the extent of the anger and frustration area residents felt when their homes repeatedly filled with flood waters. At the same time, she used the influence of powerful community leaders such as Arthur Sanford to argue and negotiate for her objectives.

AT A MEETING in late summer 1959, Treglia learned that the comprehensive plan for flood control included diverting the river channel through the Community House neighborhood. The Community House itself would be razed, and East Side families would be forced to relocate. Shocked and disheartened, Treglia, who had fought valiantly for Floyd River flood control in the 1930s, began to work to find ways to preserve the area. But strategies to save the Community House and its neighborhood had to be formed without Treglia's help. She died on October 10, 1959. A friend and colleague described the community's response.

I cannot tell you how this has left us—the whole town is mourning our Mary. We brought her [body] to Community House on Monday from one until five o'clock [*sic*]. Over 500 people filed through the building to pay their last respects. People from every possible walk of life. At one time a group of negro women sang

65. Robert Eldredge interview; Ruth Eldredge interview. Mary's control of votes in the Community House neighborhood was clear to these people, although none of them were able to say whether or not Mary's political power was a factor in this specific situation.

Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen around her casket and at another time the Russian priest in our neighborhood and his little choir, chanted their funeral service over her casket for her. Ministers, rabbis, and priests are speaking of her from their pulpits—this is a time of great grief for all those who knew her and about her.⁶⁶

Treglia worked in a place that no longer exists. In the 1960s Sioux City relocated the residents of the East Side and demolished the houses and other buildings in the area. Where frame houses once stood, a new channel for the Floyd River was created, and the area was developed, ironically, as the Mary J. Treglia Urban Renewal Project. In 1963 a new building for the Community House opened at 900 Jennings Street. After nearly four decades of relative stability, the Mary J. Treglia Community House, within four years of Treglia's death, had new leadership, a new location, and new neighbors. Treglia's death ended an era at the Community House.⁶⁷

Whether Mary Treglia was encouraging a woman to join the social activities at the Community House, teaching immigrants English, managing the Sanford Center, or mediating a conflict between East Side residents and city officials, she brought her spirit of goodwill and her zest for life with her. The skinny Italian girl who played professional baseball and loved the adventure of silent movies matured into a woman who scavenged building materials for a new Community House and found jobs for unemployed people during the depression. Her optimism is apparent in her descriptions of juvenile delinquents who were taught good manners that they displayed at Community House dances. Through the immigrant experience that she shared with East Side residents, Treglia understood their problems and challenges and worked with them to find solutions she considered appropriate.

In the tradition of settlement house directors, Mary Treglia served her neighborhood and the Sioux City community by bridging the gap between them. She interpreted the East Side

66. Jayne Yates, interview with author, Sioux City, February 1986; *Sioux City Journal*, 12, 13 October 1959; Alva C. Tolf to Fern (?), 16 October 1959, National Federation of Settlements, Social Welfare History Archives.

67. Sorensen and Chicoine, *Sioux City*, 209.

residents' needs to the community's leaders and communicated the leaders' responses back to East Side residents. Her moderation, her quest for the middle-of-the-road position, appears consistently in her negotiations with groups such as the school board. Critics might accuse Treglia of exercising social control instead of innovative and dynamic leadership, but East Side residents held her in high esteem, honoring her in many ways. The larger community also acknowledged her contributions to the city through awards and banquets; and professional groups, such as the American Association of Social Workers and the National Federation of Settlements, recognized her leadership abilities in the profession by electing her to high offices.⁶⁸ Early in her career, Treglia had described her intention to help immigrants become sufficiently familiar with American society to be able to enjoy its benefits. To that end, she contributed much to the life of her community.

68. *Ibid.*, 191; *Sioux City Tribune*, 5 January 1934; *Sioux City Journal*, 11, 16 November 1956, 29 June, 18 December 1942, 14 September 1943, 28 September 1947.

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